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Montana takes to the road

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MISSOULA--

Coach Lou Rocheleau and his Grizzlies could think of no better way to open their conference basketball schedule than with an upset win over defending Big Sky champion Weber State Saturday night in Ogden.

The University of Montana, 2-4 in pre-season competition, takes to the road for a two game stint against Weber State and Northern Arizona. The Grizzlies travel to Flagstaff, Ariz., Monday evening for a clash with the Lumberjacks.

Rocheleau said his charges are ready for the Weber challenge. "We know we'll have to play our best game to beat Weber, but I think our players want to win bad." The first-year Grizzly coach said Weber has employed a lot of zone defenses with 6-8 All-American Willie Sojourner covering the middle. "Sojourner plugs up that middle, and Weber funnels everything to the outside. This forces teams to take the lesser percentage shots," he said.

Rocheleau plans to counter the Weber zones with a couple of overload offenses. The Montana coach started double practice sessions Wednesday to prepare the offenses.

Weber also has good size and will start four men over 6-5, Rocheleau said. Bob Davis, 6-6 and Richard Cooper, 6-7, will probably be the forwards and 6-5 Jon Knoble will operate as a guard-forward combination.

Knoble gave the Grizzlies headaches in Ogden last season with his deadly outside shooting.

Turning to Northern Arizona, Rocheleau said the Lumberjacks are far from a pushover. NAU had an 18-6 season last year but graduations wiped out five of six regulars from 1970.

Coach Herb Gregg is relying on lone starter Walt Mannon, a 6-2 guard, to break in a host of junior college transfers.

Greg is depending on 6-7 frontcourt stalwarts. Floyd Mathew, George Schumacher and Kermit Rankin to carry the Lumberjacks.

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Rocheleau said his charges will fly to Ogden Friday and work out before Saturday's game.

The Montana coach said he will go with Lonzo Lewis at the short post and Ray Howard and Earl Tye at the high posts. At the guard spots Rocheleau plans to start Wetzel and either Jeff Nord, Mike Heroux or Mike Vernon.

The Montana team hit the practice floor last Sunday after a week off for Christmas.

Rocheleau said the Grizzlies have better continuity on the floor and the offensive and defensive patterns are starting to flow.

"It takes time to develop team work, but our kids have worked hard at it and want to win bad," Rocheleau said.

Rocheleau said the addition of 6-5 Willie Bascus has improved the Grizzlies. "Willie has looked real good in practice and is anxious to earn a starting berth," Rocheleau said. Bascus will probably see a lot of action this weekend.

Montana returns home on January 7 to meet Montana State in the Adams Field House.

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